



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

MAY 10, 2015
THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Another Way to Love . . . and Live
Genesis 2:18-30; John 15:9-17

The creation stories fit perfectly with this time of year because, as we walk outside, we notice life popping up everywhere. Flowers are blooming, trees are leafing out, shrubs are growing, and animal life is abundant. Sometimes we overlook that verse in Genesis which tells us that when God wanted to provide the man with a partner, “Out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air . . .” (2:19). I read those words and the image of a real “animal farm” pops into my mind with rows of rabbits, deer, squirrels, cats, and dogs growing over here and rows of sparrows, robins, bluebirds, and eagles sprouting over there!

“Out of the ground.” Those few words remind us that all of creation, as different as individual things may appear, emerges from the same basic elements. In other words, it is all made of the same “stuff.” In fact, just prior to the passage we just read, we are told that God also formed humans from the “dust of the earth.” And it all took place in a garden. What a delightful image!

Then we read that in order to create a partner equal and appropriate for the man, God took a rib from the man and formed a woman. The basic elements were the same—still “earthy”—but they were more like one another than they were the rest of the animals. We tend to think that in the garden, all was bliss; Yet, like every couple, Adam and Eve had their share of tensions.

It happened that Adam stayed out very late for a few nights and Eve became upset. “You’re running around with other women,” she accused her mate.

“Eve, honey, you’re being unreasonable,” Adam responded. “You know you’re the only woman on earth.” They continued to quarrel until Adam was so exhausted that he fell asleep. He didn’t sleep long, however, for he was soon awakened by a strange pain in his side. It was Eve poking him about the torso.

"What do you think you're doing?" Adam demanded.

"Counting your ribs," said Eve.

As far as we know, Adam had only one rib missing! Nonetheless, this story of the creation of woman has prompted some people to consider it the first account of a human transplant. That may be pushing the intent of the story a bit, but it does tell us that God took a part of the man and created new life altogether. After all, that is what organ and tissue transplants are all about. As the transplant motto says, "Donate Life." That is precisely what the Bible tells us the man did.

I daresay that every one of us knows someone who has been directly affected by organ and tissue donation. At the very minimum, many of us have donated blood, perhaps at our annual blood drive. As you know, one pint of blood can save up to three lives. Some of you—or your loved ones—are the recipients of donated blood through surgery or trauma. Donating blood is truly giving a gift of life.

The Apostle John tells us that as Jesus was sharing the Passover with his disciples, he attempted to distill his three years of ministry into teachings they could remember. "This is my commandment," he said, "that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:12-13). Organ and tissue donation is a profound way to demonstrate the love we have for one another and to enable one another to live.

Organ donation has taken on new meaning for me since I became a part of this congregation. When Sheila and Jim Martin joined our Lakeside family, we learned that in 1997 Sheila had shared one of her kidneys with her son Jim. That gift, which enabled him to live and continue to fulfill the dreams God had for him, also made it possible for his three children to be born into this world, three talented and compassionate individuals who are already impacting the world in their own ways. What a wonderful example of a mother's love to celebrate on Mother's Day? Mothers nurture and care for their children throughout life and do many things to keep their children alive and healthy. To donate a kidney in order to save a child's life is one of those ultimate expressions of love for our children to which we aspire every day. As a family, the Martins and Pittmans continue to give to others through their annual golf tournament which raises both funds for and awareness of organ

and tissue donation. That tournament is in its thirteenth year of loving other people and giving life.

Ten years ago Ed Astin received a lung transplant which made it possible for him to continue to thrive and enjoy his family. At the time of the transplant, Ed and Pat had only one grandchild. Now they have six grandchildren whom they enjoy immensely. Had a lung not been available, Ed would never have known his other five grandchildren nor would they have benefitted from his influence in their lives. Moreover, Ed has been able to share these past ten years with Pat, with his children, and with his own parents.

Twelve years ago, Beverly Bulluck, a friend to many at Lakeside, joined our secretarial staff. Beverly was efficient and funny, compassionate and talented. A chronic lung disease eventually caused her to give up her work here, but a double-lung transplant allowed her to continue living for a number of years. That gift meant a great deal to her husband, her son, her family, and certainly to her many friends in this congregation and our community.

A few years ago, our congregation joined many other churches in this community in praying for a young lady named Courtney Moss. Courtney needed a heart transplant. For a long time she was unable to participate in school or other activities as a teenager ought to do. She carried a back pack with her everywhere. In it was a pump which helped her weakened heart to function until a replacement was found. Last year, Courtney received her new heart. Some of us saw her a week or so ago at a party for the Pitt Charity Golf Tournament. She was radiant—and carried no backpack! She is back at school, recently attended her prom, and has her life ahead of her. Like many organ recipients, Courtney is already working to help other people live through the gift of organ donations.

These four friends and thousands more like them are the beneficiaries of the kind of love Jesus talked about and exemplified. Ordinary folks like you and me cared enough about other people—people they would likely never even know—to donate vital organs so that these children of God—and their sisters and brothers—could live.

Obviously, for major organ donations like hearts and lungs, one life ends in order for another life to continue. Every recipient of a donor organ I have ever known has been keenly aware of this fact and deeply grateful to that person and his or her family for the generosity of sharing the gift of a life that

is ending. Yet, organ donation is not a matter of taking life or causing death. The reality of our humanity is that we die. We all die. Sadly, some people die of illness or accident far too soon. As tragic as those deaths are, they offer an opportunity to continue life. Organ donation is an opportunity to support the lives of other people and, in some way, to continue to live through them. What greater love and gratitude for life could any of us express than to make it possible for other people to live and thrive when our own life has reached its end? And not all donations depend on one life ending. Kidney and liver transplants can be made by living donors.

As of yesterday afternoon, there are more than 123,000 people in the United States waiting for an organ transplant. Over one hundred thousand people are in need of a kidney. Over 15,000 need a liver transplant while 4,207 people are waiting for a heart and 1,610 are hoping for a lung. Forty people need a heart-lung transplant. In North Carolina, 3,166 people are waiting for some form of a transplant. Over 2,700 of those individuals, like our own Ed Astin, are hoping for a kidney. Two hundred and fifty-five people need a liver transplant, one hundred and forty-two people need a heart transplant, and twenty-five people need a lung. These are our friends, our neighbors, our loved ones.

I offer these statistics simply to give some sense of the scope of need that exists in our world. The good news is that last year 29, 532 transplants were completed in the United States. Since 1988, almost 627,000 transplants have taken place. That is well over a half a million lives saved and millions more impacted because thousands of people loved enough to donate life.¹

A healthy organ like a lung, heart, kidney, liver, pancreas, or small intestine can replace a diseased organ in someone who is fighting for life. Tissues such as skin, bone, corneas, heart valves, and veins can be used in corrective or reconstructive surgery to help someone become healthy and regain vitality. Imagine being able to help someone walk again, see again, or run and play again. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

For most of us, organ and tissue donation is simply a matter of indicating our desire to donate our organs and tissues upon our death. We can do that by first making our family, friends, and physicians aware of our

¹All data was accessed on May 9, 2015 from the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network website: <http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov>.

willingness to donate. We can also indicate our interest by having a heart placed on our driver's license designating us as a donor. It is also possible to register as a donor online at DonateLifeNC.org. If computers are not your forte, you can call Donate Life North Carolina for a form and mail it in.²

The country music duo Wilson-Fairchild offers a song about donating life that emerged from personal experience. The refrain captures the essence of sharing life through organ and tissue donation:

One man's sacrifice is one man's miracle,
Someone's pain heals someone's pain.
One heart breaks and one heart keeps beating on.
By one hand, two lives are saved.³

Mother's day is a good day to remember the many ways in which one person does so much to nurture and enhance the lives of other people. It is also a good day for us to think about the ways in which we might be able to give the gift of life to someone we may never know. Our gift, especially as life ends for us, might well be the miracle someone else is praying for. When that happens, many lives are saved. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Amen.

²Donate Life North Carolina, P.O. Box 51262, Durham, NC 27717; 1-800-200-2672.

³Wil Reid, "By One Hand," *Live and Well*, Label Yell Records, 2008.

May 10, 2015

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Each day of life is an opportunity for our spirits to rejoice in the experience of your grace, Holy God, but in the beauty of springtime and the celebrations of this Easter season, your generosity is especially apparent. The new life springing forth around us serves as a reminder that, like a nurturing mother, you take delight in your children and in all of creation. The variety of colors and textures and fragrances in every yard and field make evident your love of diversity and your artistry which dances with exuberance across every hill and valley, through every stream and forest. Warm breezes and gentle rains soothe and renew the earth just as your Holy Spirit offers the comfort and vitality of your abiding love for us. Every corner of our world bears the imprint of your creative handiwork and desire for life, and every creature sings forth your majesty. In the midst of such a bounty, Gracious God, how can we not be filled with wonder and gratitude as we recognize the abundance of gifts which give meaning to our lives and move our hearts to worship and praise?

Surrounded by such splendor and brimming with the possibilities of the joyful life you offer, we pray, Merciful God, that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear not only the magnificence of your world but also the rich beauty of our human family. Attune our hearts to share the extravagant love we have known from you and to respond to others with a generosity of spirit because we have been shown great mercy. Teach us to sense your closeness in both the joys and challenges we face, believing your promise that you have chosen us, given yourself for us, and will never leave us. Help us to know, in the guidance of your word, in the companionship of one another, in the smallest expression of kindness or the grandest of miracles, that you abide with us and that your love is unailing.

And equip us, Gracious God, to reflect the light of your presence for others who, because of illness or grief, poverty or hopelessness, violence or injustice, have long felt distant from you or wonder if you are there at all. Fill our hearts with compassion and courage, instead of condemnation and fear, toward those whose languages or beliefs or customs are different from our own. Strengthen our hands to reach out with acceptance and healing rather than promote division or lash out in anger. Guide our feet to places of service, and enable us to follow your example of sacrificial love and your affirmation of abundant life so that others might experience the grace you have so freely given. In the name of the Christ who came to dwell among us and by the power of your Holy Spirit who abides with us still. Amen.

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